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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: DPP'S DRAFT CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies on October 5 printed special cover pages or reported on the front page the victory of Taiwan-born New York Yankees pitcher Wang Chien-ming in a major league playoff opening game. On the political side, most major dailies highlighted criticism by DPP heavyweights, such as Premier Su Tseng-chang, against the party's draft constitutional reform. The dailies also carried stories in page two on Deputy U.S. State Department Spokesman Tom Casey's comment on the U.S. position toward President Chen's commitment to the "Four No's." And according to a [pro-unification] "United Daily News" story datelined from Washington, sources said it was clear that the United States had sent messages to Taiwan through different channels and demanded that Chen not "play lawyer" in his attempt to make major constitutional reforms.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" noted that for the DPP to propose a major constitutional reform at this moment was like committing collective suicide. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said that Chen Shui-bian's proposal for constitutional reform will only worsen Washington's distrust of him without relieving him from the pressure to step down. End summary.

A) "The DPP's Urge to Commit Suicide"

Columnist Antonio Chiang commented in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (10/5):

"... The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is still the ruling party. However, it has long lost its sense of responsibility as a government because of a lack of confidence. The DPP's draft constitutional reform is an indication of a kind of urge to commit collective suicide.

"The DPP government is now in precarious times. While the party should be striving for its existence and survival, its leadership is actively promoting its blueprint for constitutional reform with the knowledge that the party is facing a critical life-and-death moment.

There is not yet a consensus within the party over the reform, not to mention a ruling party - opposition accord. In light of the Anti-Bian movement, there is no chance for the reform to succeed. But the party center is treating it as an historical mission. It is as if the draft must be put forward in order to frighten people.

"Bian has already lost his presidential authority. Promoting a new constitution has been one of his political promises. But Bian himself knows very well that his proposal for constitutional reform at present will never be realized. It is one thing that the party center does not want to win public support. But why does it want to turn the poisonous promise made by Bian into an historical mission. Such a move is no less than sacrificing the whole party for one

single person. The move is more incomprehensible than collective suicide."

B) "Chen's Proposition for New Constitution Just a Hoax"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (10/5):

"... The United States government has also expressed concern over President Chen's plans to overhaul the Constitution. U.S. Department of State Deputy Spokesman Tom Casey issued a warning in public.

"... The U.S. is Taiwan's staunchest ally. Assistance from Washington is essential in ensuring Taiwan's success in repelling an invasion by the mainland's troops. Without U.S. support, the island can hardly defend itself from a full-scale attack launched by Beijing.

"... In fact, President Chen himself is probably aware that he was building castles in the air by proposing the rewriting of the Constitution. His proposal is aimed mainly to divert attention from the corruption allegations that have been dogging him and his family over the few months.

"... The President's call for a radically revised Constitution has deepened Washington's distrust of him and has caused new tension in the Taiwan Strait. It has done little to relieve the pressure for him to step down.

WANG